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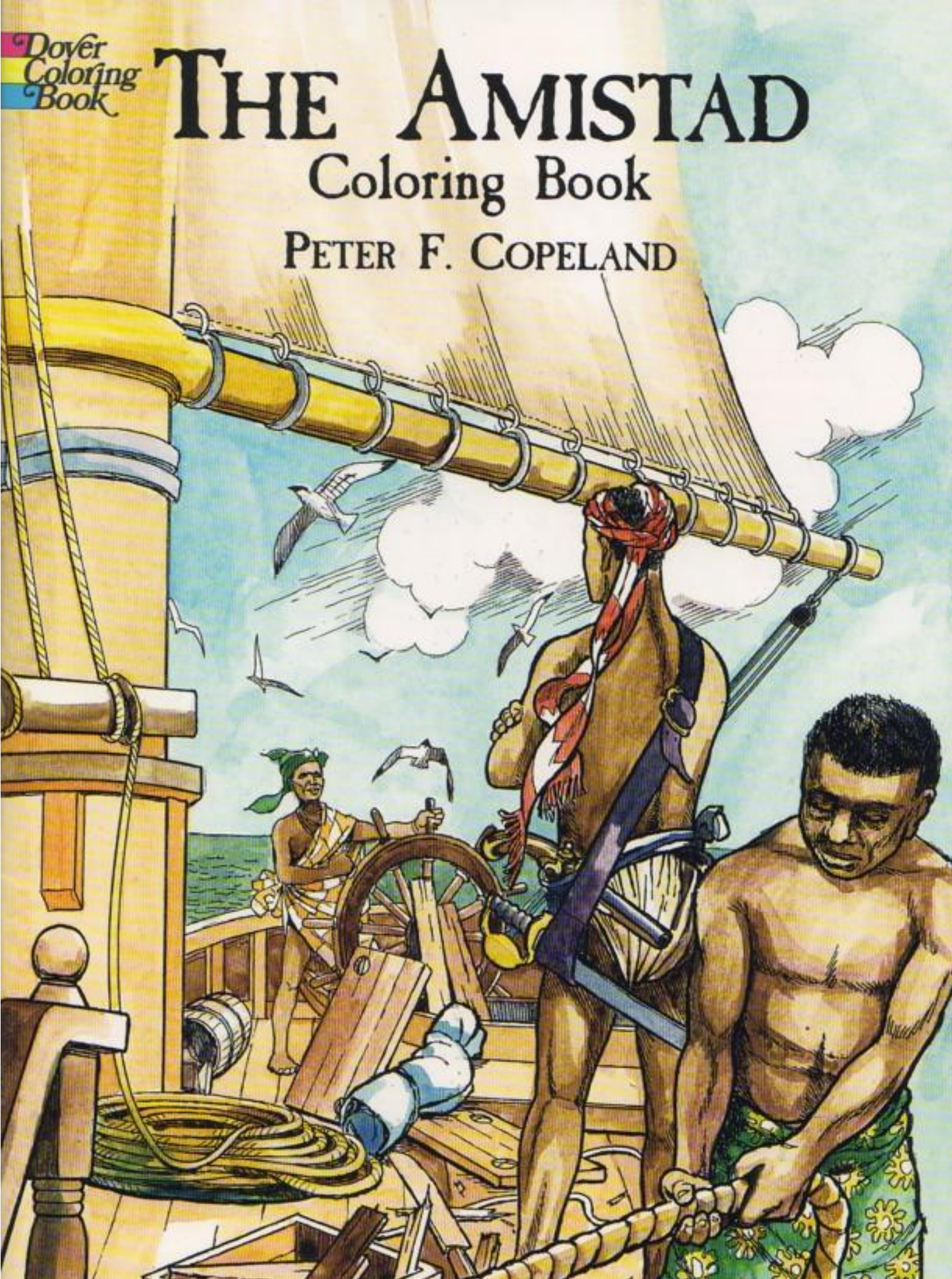
Dover Coloring Book

THE AMISTAD
Coloring Book

PETER F. COPELAND

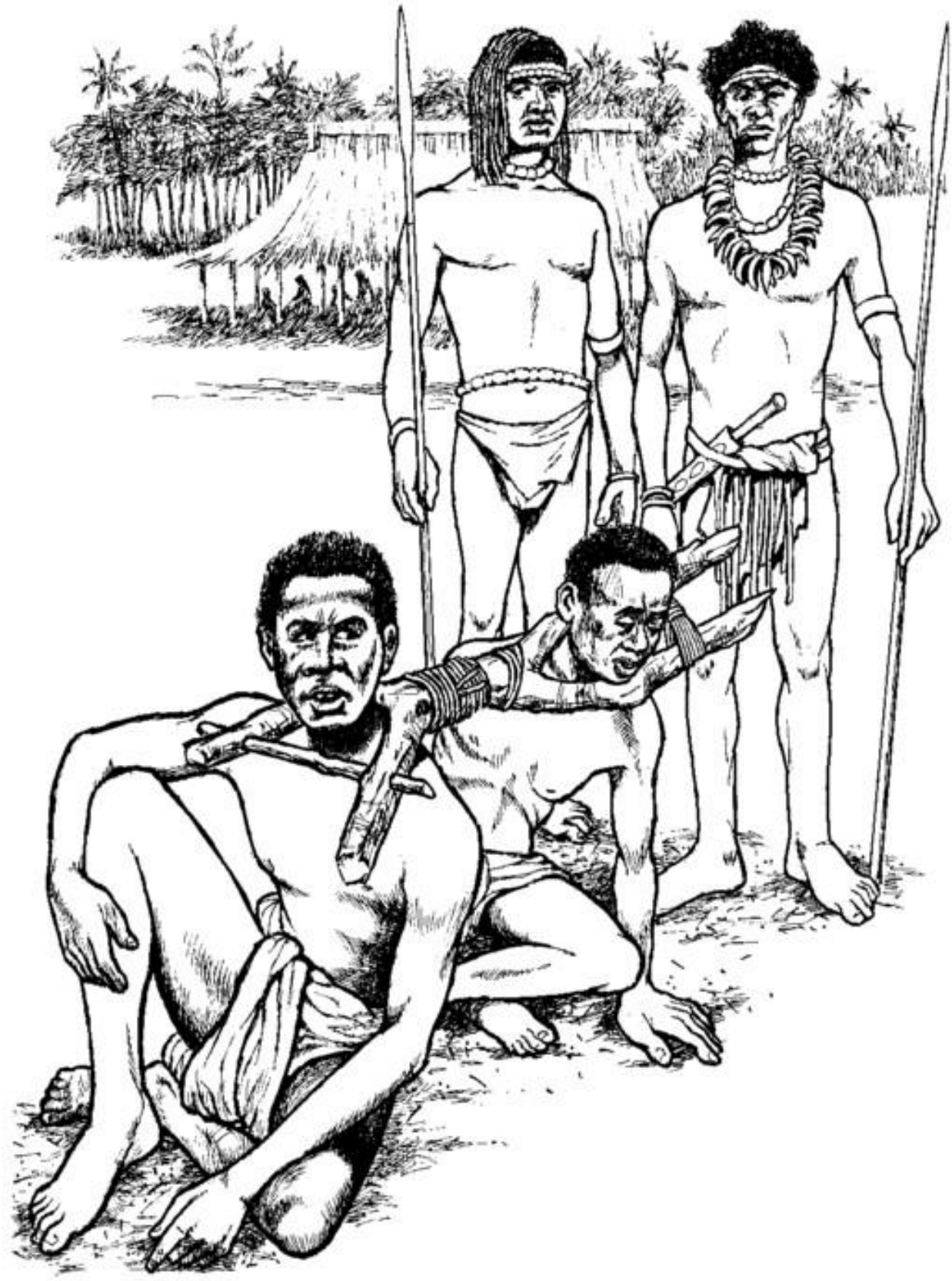


INTRODUCTION

The *Amistad* was a beautiful vessel—a long, rakish topsail schooner built for speed and maneuverability. A report in the *Columbian Centinel*, a Massachusetts newspaper, contained a reference to the ship as a "long, low, black schooner." Her Baltimore builders might justly have been proud of her, but for the fact that in the year 1839 she flew the Spanish flag and was engaged in the slave trade. The importation of African slaves to the Caribbean islands began in the early sixteenth century. By the end of the seventeenth century, massive numbers of slaves were being sent to sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Slaves reached North America in 1619; the trade grew into the hundreds of thousands in the mid-1750s, and later, the millions, by the Civil War era. The boom in tobacco and cotton followed sugar, and plantation owners sought ever-increasing numbers of workers.

The slave revolt that occurred aboard the *Amistad* was not the first, nor the last, of its kind. However, most other such uprisings were savagely suppressed by armed crew members; in the case of the *Amistad* the slaves overcame the ship's crew and killed the captain. While attempting to sail the ship back to Africa and freedom, they came ashore on the coast of Long Island, where they were imprisoned as mutineers and murderers.

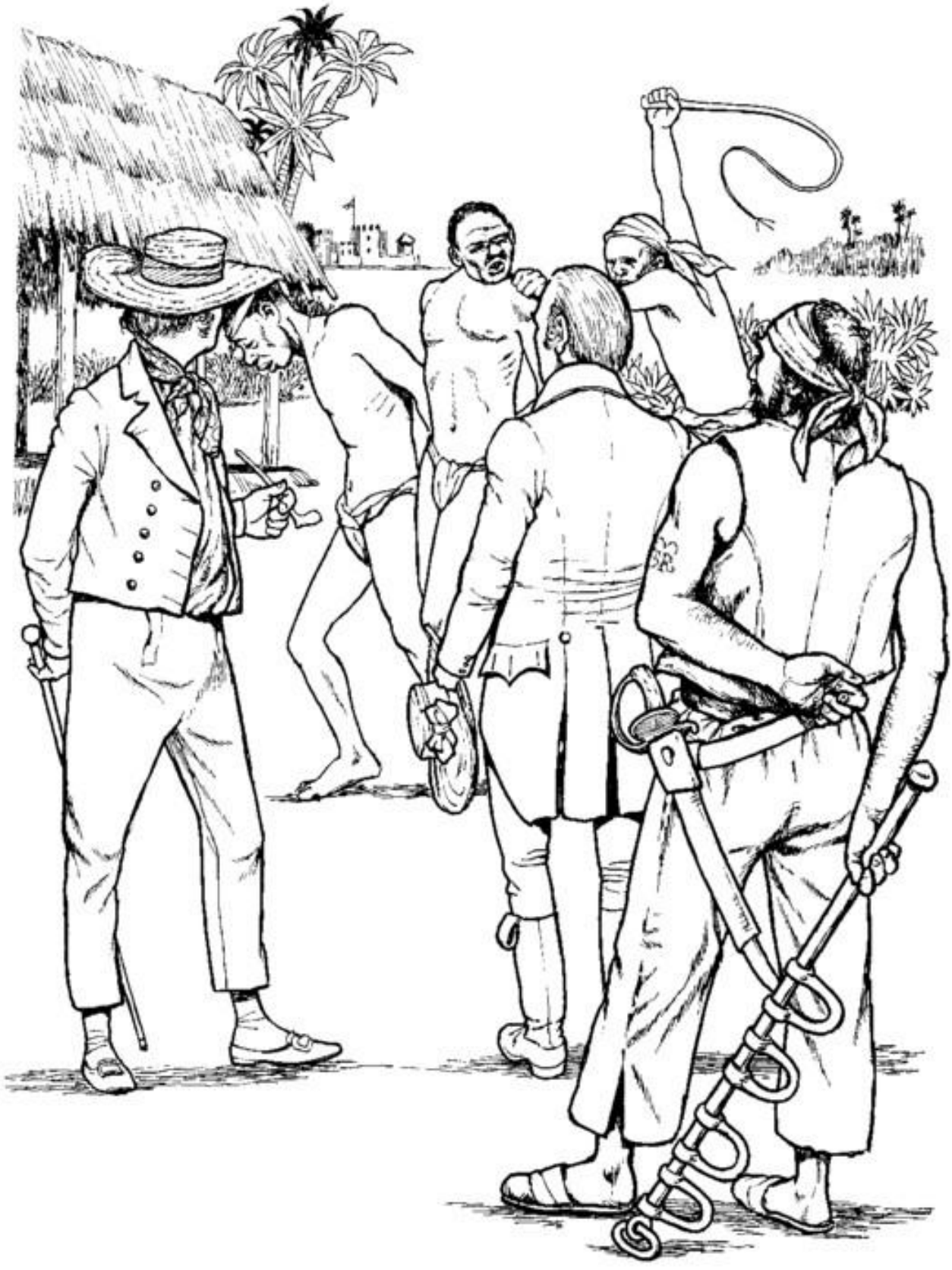
Their cause was taken up by outraged abolitionists and religious groups (in 1787, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded by Anglicans and supported by Quakers), and they eventually had their day in court in one of the most sensational cases of the nineteenth century. The Africans were defended in court by a former U.S. president, John Quincy Adams. They were eventually exonerated and granted their freedom, returning to Africa to the jubilation of anti-slavery forces. The slave revolt aboard the *Amistad* became a milestone along the road that led to the Civil War and the eventual eradication of slavery in the United States.



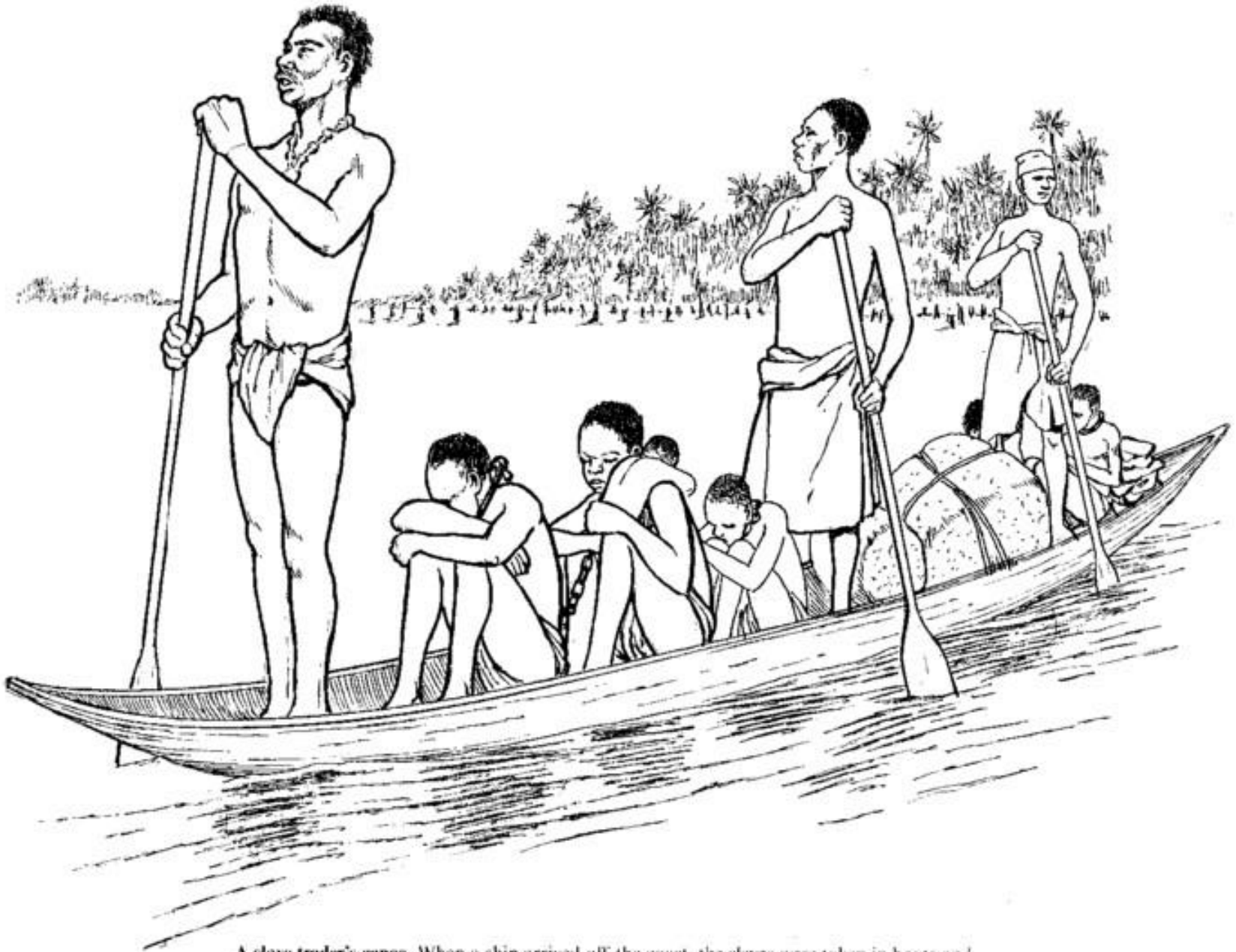
African villagers captured by slavers. The slaves who eventually came to be aboard the *Amistad* were taken by raiding parties, snatched from their villages or from the fields where they raised their crops. They were secured in crude wooden yokes such as those shown here and marched to collection centers along the coast. They were then shipped to slave "factories" in the New World.

A village in Mende country (now Sierra Leone), West Africa. Most of the slaves carried aboard the *Amistad* were poor farmers of the Mende [also referred to as Mendi or Mandi] people, from the area that is now Sierra Leone in West Africa. Here are conical huts of a typical small Mende village.

The slave traders. The slavers were Africans and Arabs who ran the slave markets along the West African coast, known in those days as the Slave Coast. Here we see Arab merchants haggling over the purchase of female slaves from their African captors. Girls and young women were often sold to African buyers and sometimes filled the harems of local merchants and chiefs.

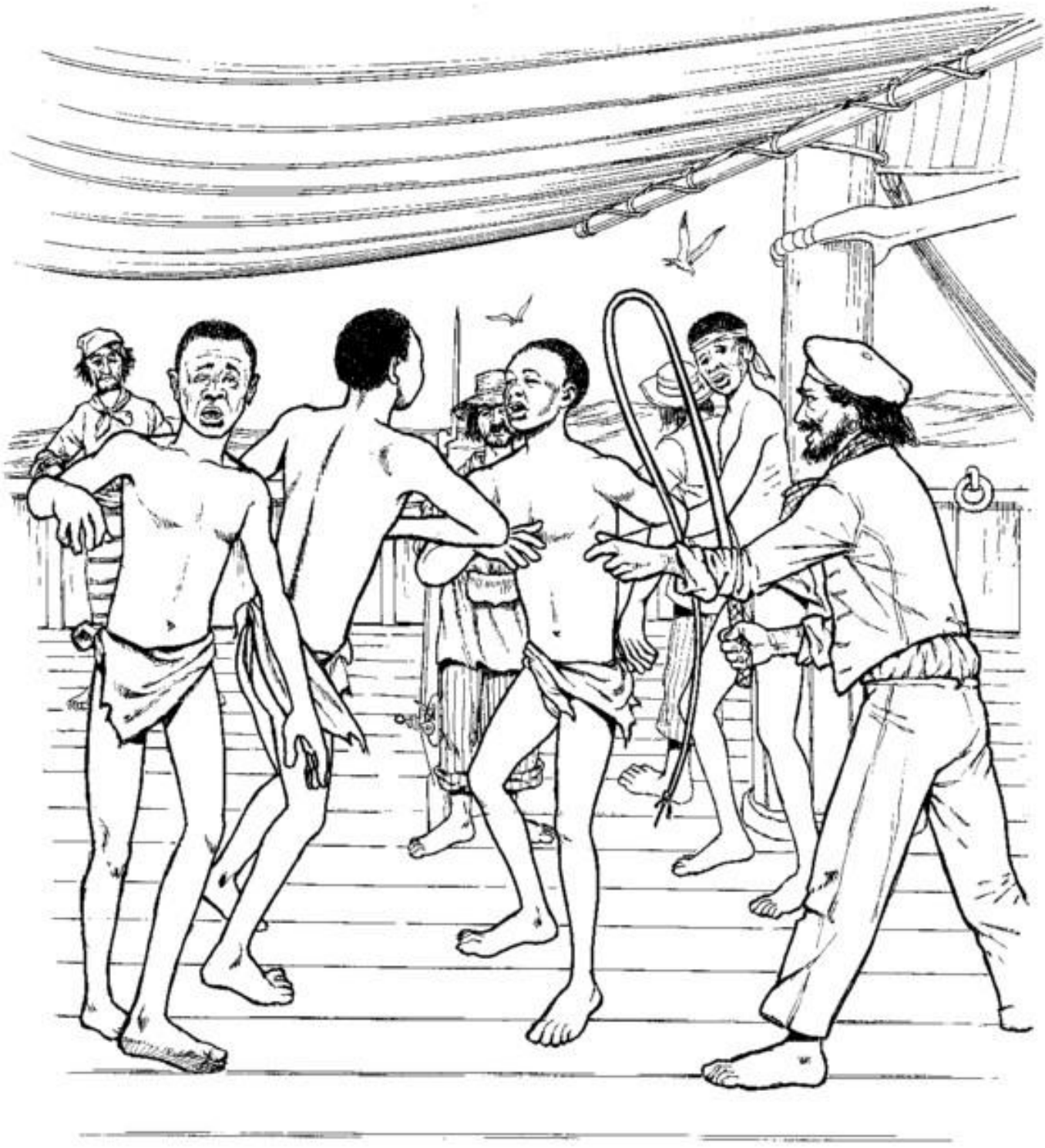


European slave buyers. Scattered along the Slave Coast were the forts built by the Europeans to support the slave trade; it was at these forts that the slave markets were situated. Here slaves were inspected by merchants and purchased for shipment to the New World. When a deal was struck, the slaves were chained up in slave sheds to await shipment overseas. Here we see Spanish buyers inspecting newly captured Africans for possible purchase.



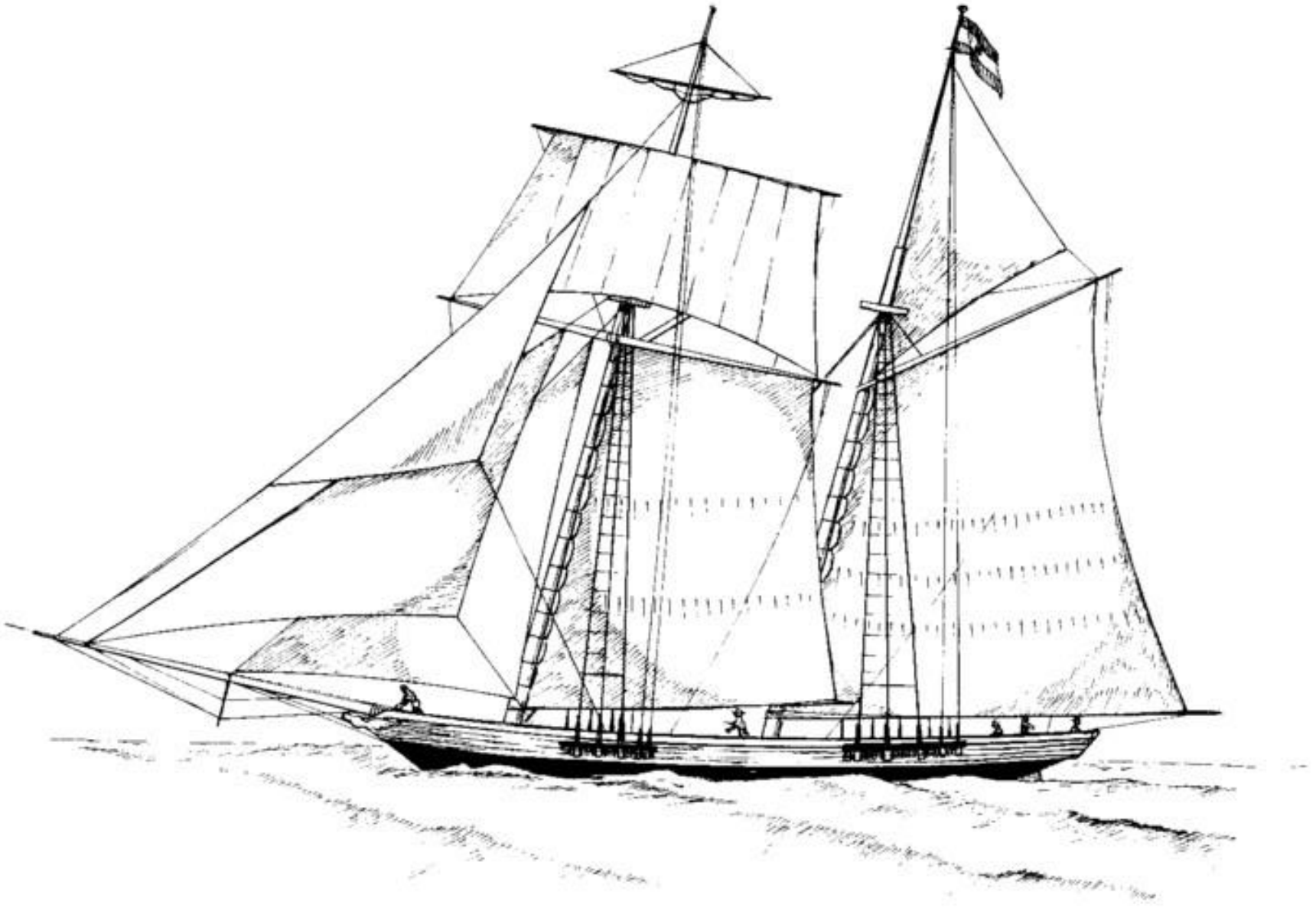
A slave trader's canoe. When a ship arrived off the coast, the slaves were taken in boats and canoes to be stowed aboard for shipment to America.

Departure from Africa's shores. Slaves were chained and delivered to the slave ships in groups known as *coffles*; they were then packed on board for the long, hard journey west. A slave's last glimpse of his or her homeland usually occurred just before the chained group was driven down below decks and packed into the hold. Here we see a slave ship loaded with its human cargo leaving the Slave Coast for the passage to America.

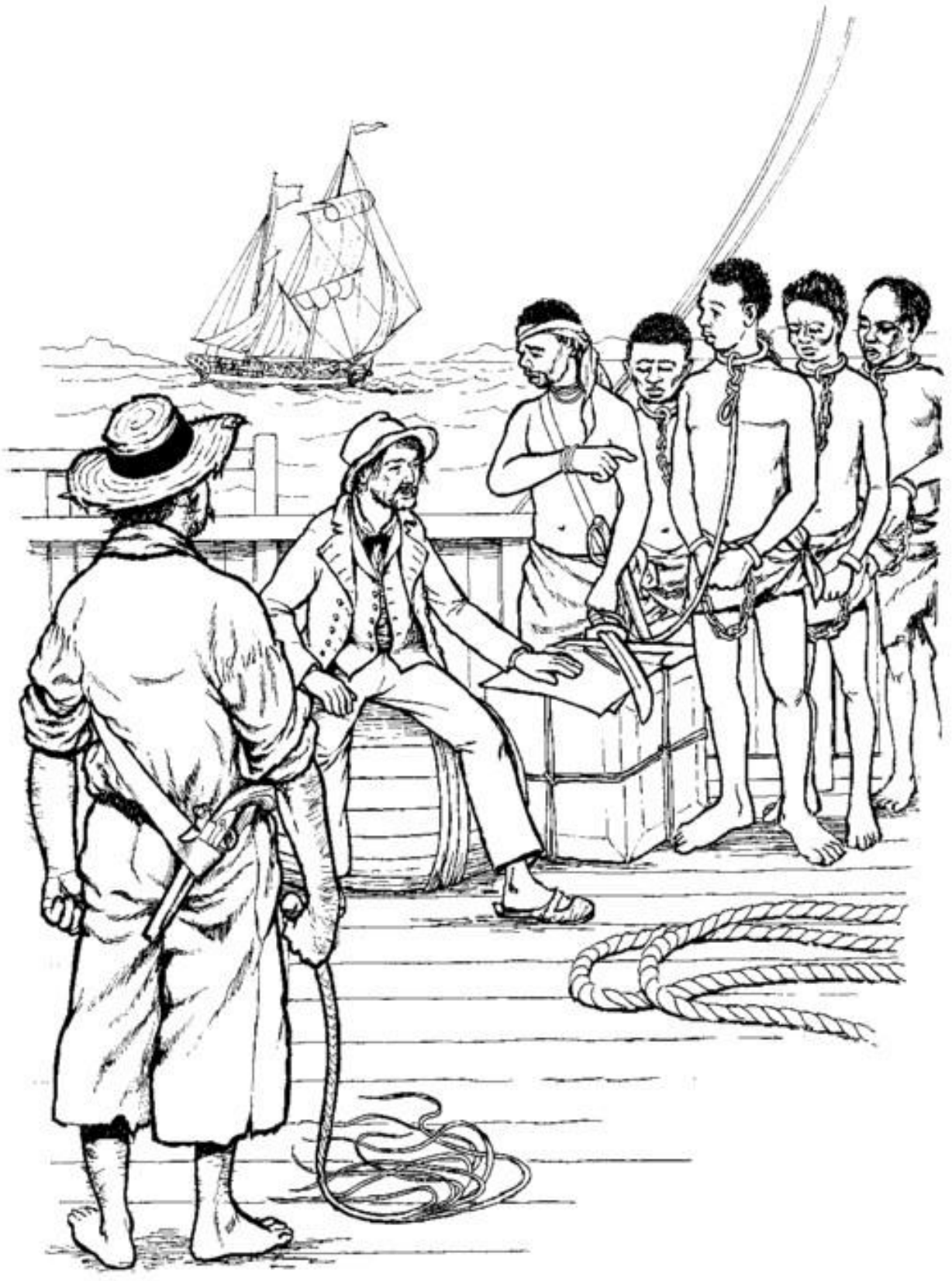


Exercising prisoners on the deck of the *Amistad*. There was a high death rate aboard the slave ships, including desperate suicides. The Africans did not know where they were bound, nor what their fate might be. Fever, infection, dysentery, and diseases such as smallpox and scurvy were common—not surprising, considering the wretched living conditions aboard the slave ships. In an effort to lessen the death rate and improve the condition of their cargo of slaves, the crew brought small groups of slaves up to the deck each day for exercise, as shown here.

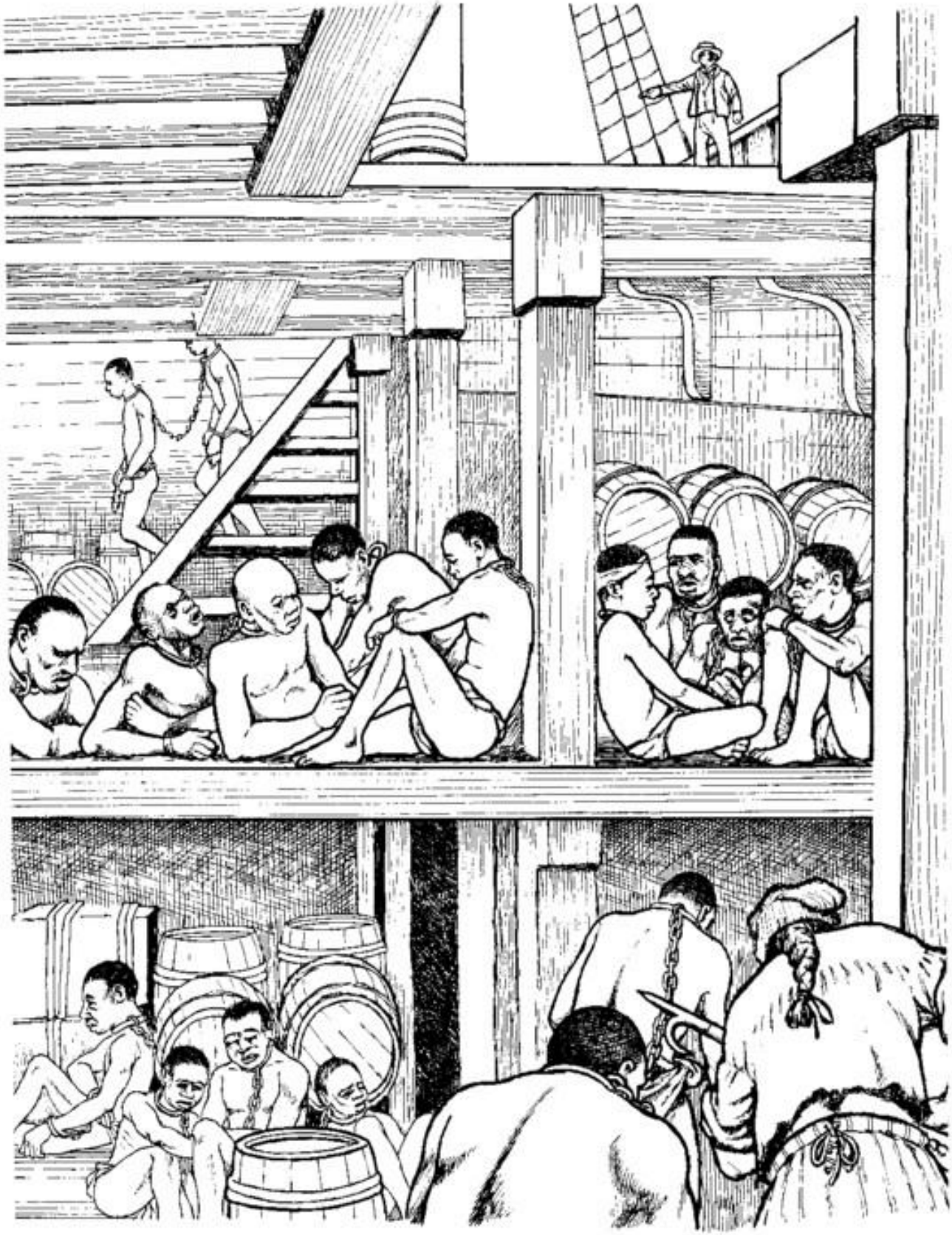
Inspecting newly arrived slaves for sale. Upon arrival in the Caribbean islands, slaves were brought ashore. They were washed and fed, exercised, and generally made to look as healthy as possible, with a view toward purchase. Buyers in Africa planned to sell their cargo to American planters, and the planters insisted upon a careful inspection. Depicted here is a slave undergoing inspection by prospective buyers for signs of disease. The Mende slaves, traveling on the schooner *Tecora*, landed at Cuba for sale to the island's Spanish planters.



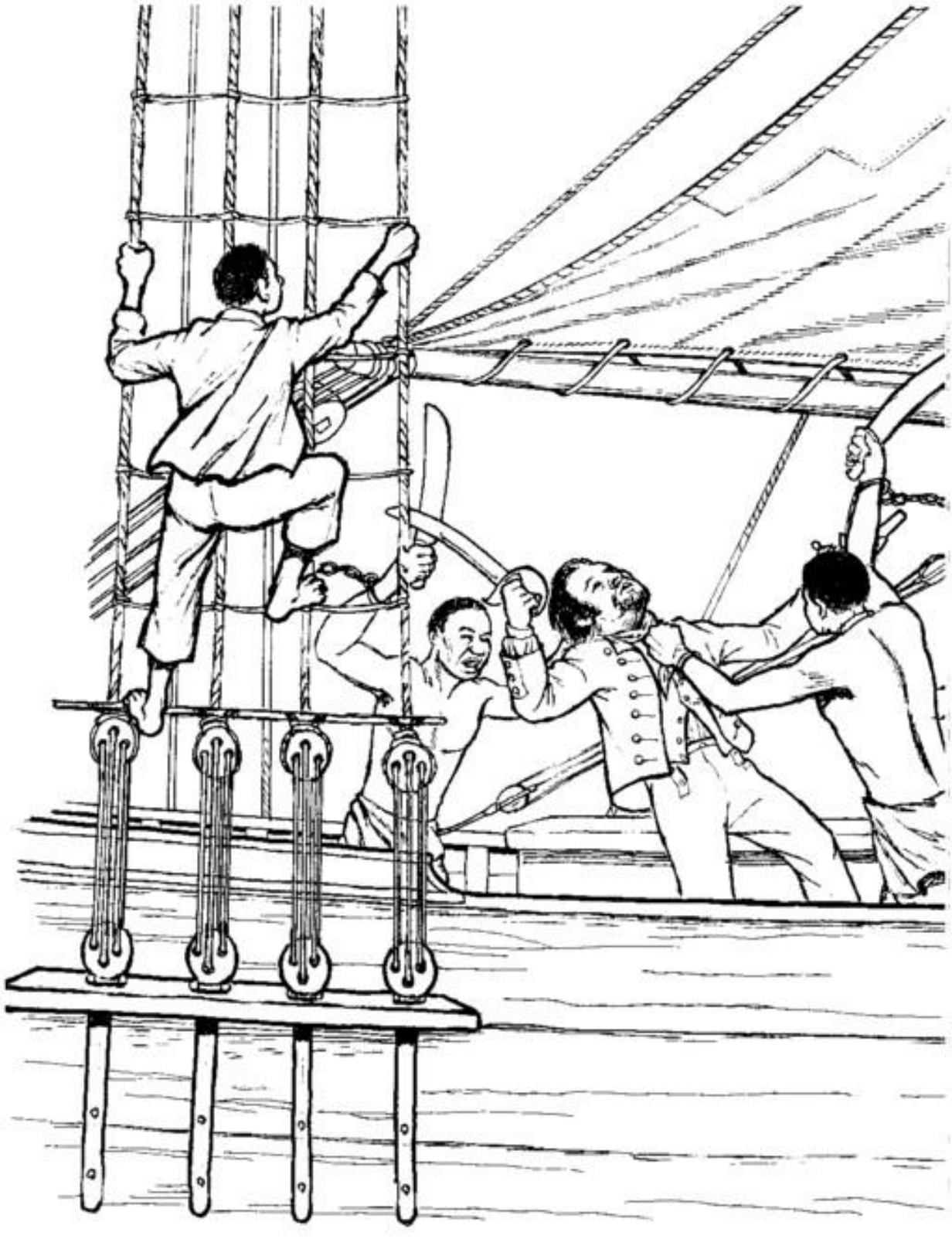
The schooner *Amistad*. Here we see a portrait of the slave schooner *Amistad*. Her name originally was *Friendship;* it was changed to *La Amistad* (Spanish for "friendship") when the ship was registered to a Spaniard. The *Amistad* was built for speed and was only lightly armed. Many schooners of her class were built in the U.S. during the War of 1812. A large number of vessels were used after the war by privateers, pirates, smugglers, and slavers.



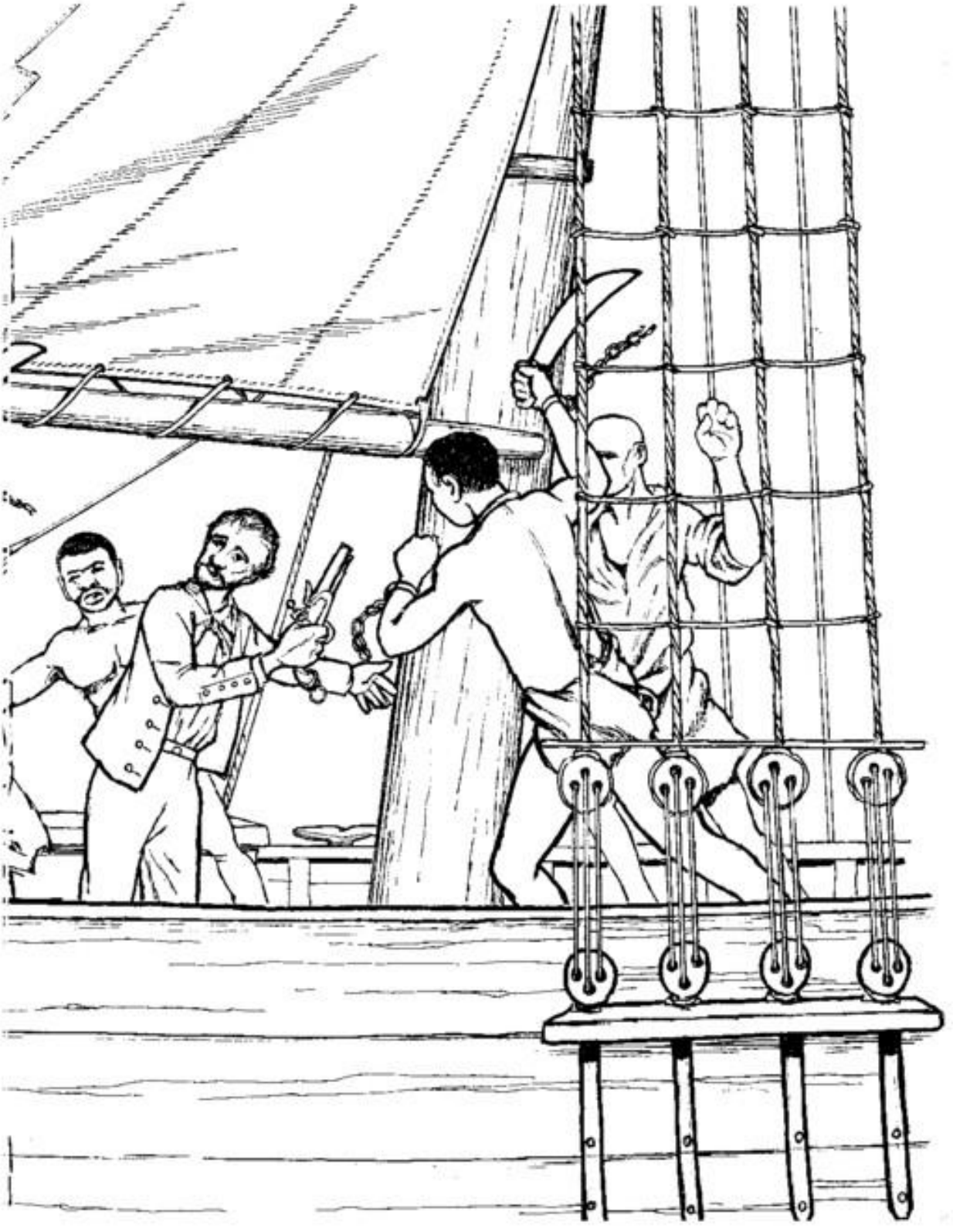
The slaves are transferred to the *Amistad*. The Mende captives were put ashore at Havana, Cuba. They were given Spanish names (Singbe Pieh became Joseph Cinque) and were presented as slaves who had been in Cuba for quite some time. They were purchased by Don Jose Ruiz, a Spanish planter, and brought aboard the *Amistad* for shipment to Ruiz's plantation.



The slaves are stowed in the hold. The *Amistad* carried a mixed cargo of slaves and general freight to Ruiz's plantation, which was located a few days' sail down the Cuban coast. Here we see the slaves, chained together, being stowed in the ship's hold.

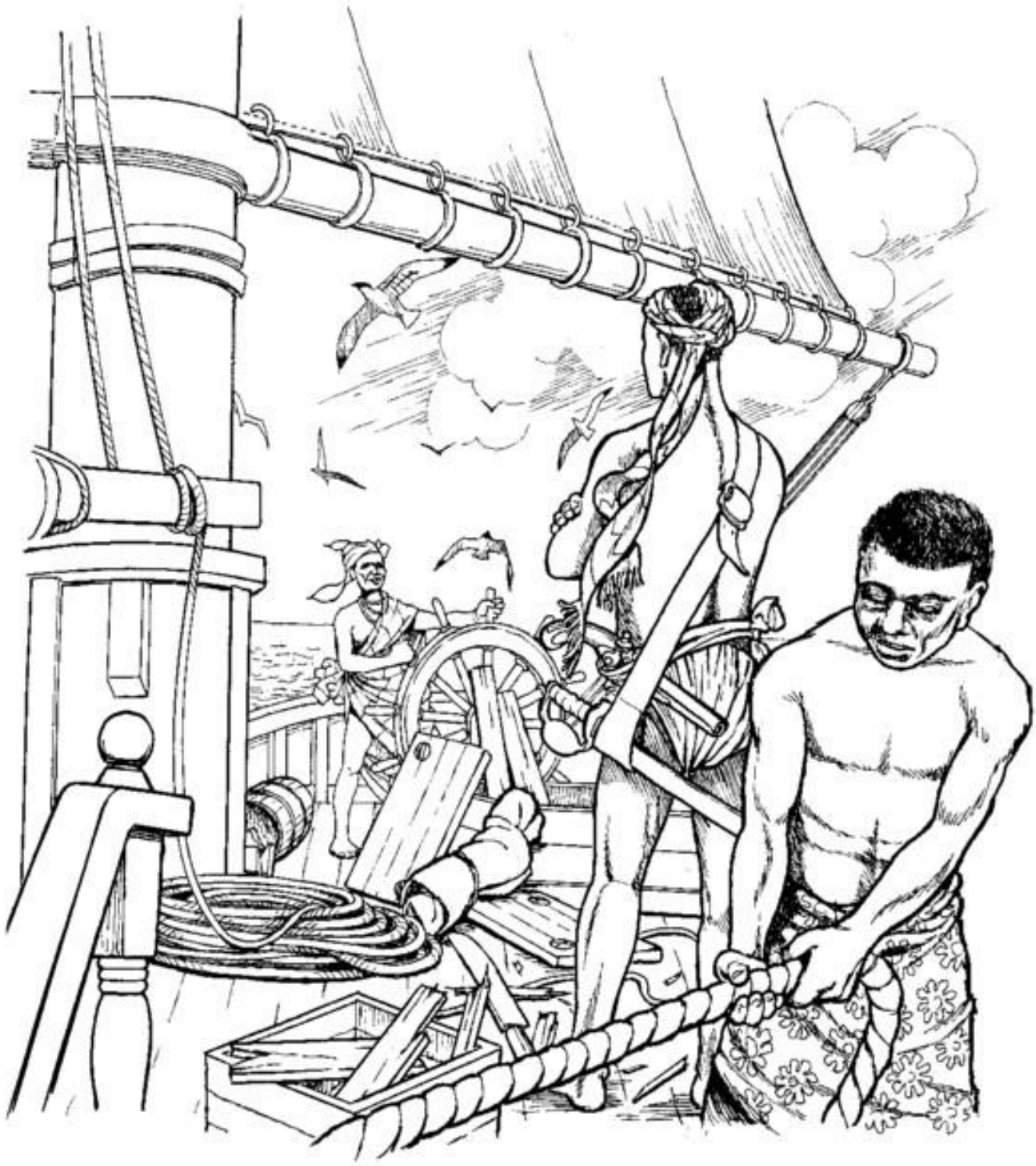


The revolt of the *Amistad* slaves. One of the *Amistad* slaves, Cinque the son of a Mende village headman—became the impromptu leader of the Africans in their bondage. He managed, in the darkness of the ship's hold, to free himself and his companions of their chains. Working all night, these men managed to free all the slaves of their fetters. They stealthily broke into the bales of cargo in the hold and found a consignment of sugar cane knives with 32-inch blades, tools meant to be used by the slaves for their work on the plantation.

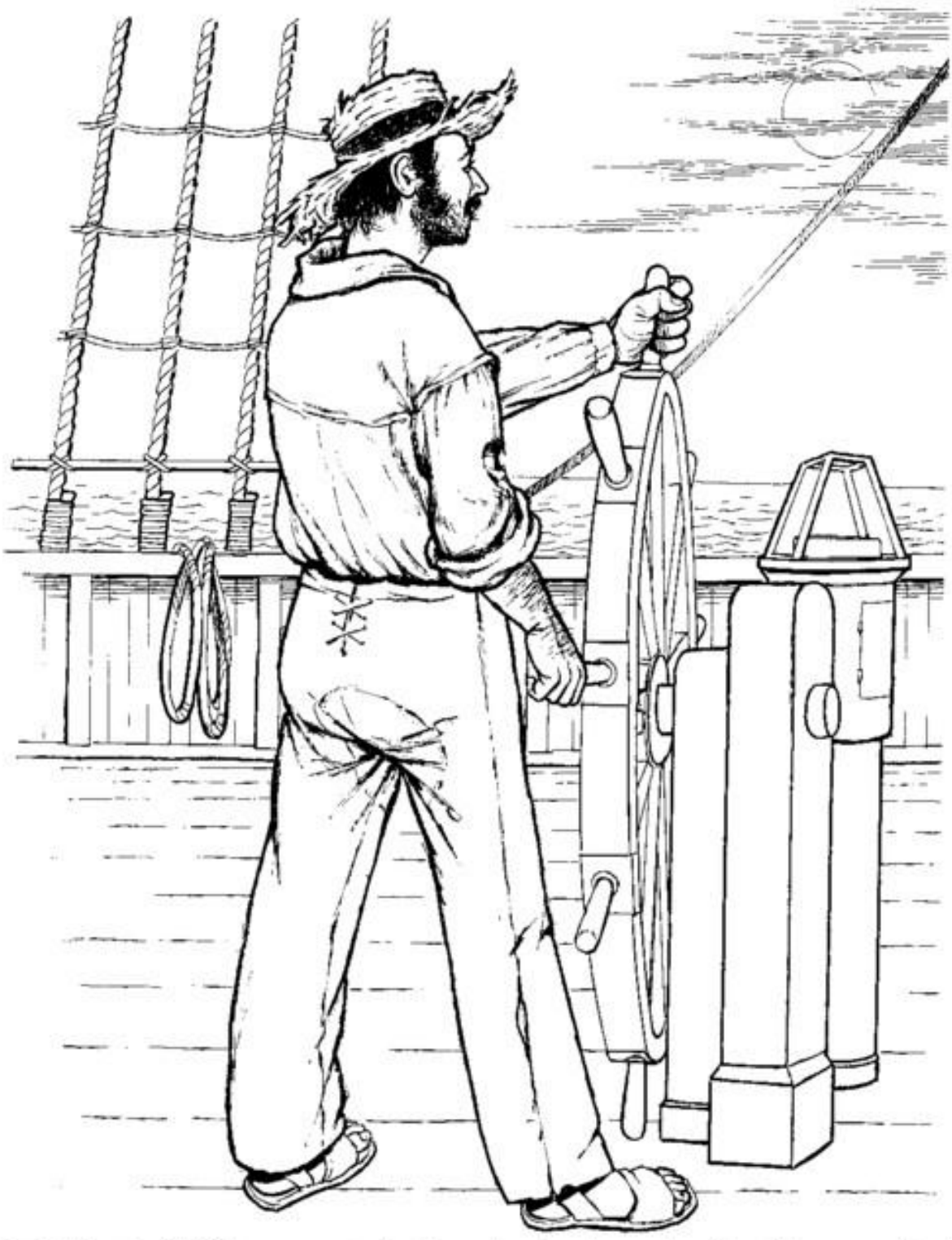


Having armed themselves, the men crept out onto the deck and attacked the sleeping crew members. The sailors fought desperately until at last they launched a boat and fled, pulling toward the Cuban coast. The ship's captain, Ramon Ferrer, was killed in the fight, after killing two of his attackers. The ship's cook was killed as well (the cook was said to have alarmed the Mendes by pantomiming that they would be cooked and eaten at the voyage's end). The slaves captured Jose Ruiz, the plantation owner who had purchased the slaves in Havana, and Pedro Montez, a partner of Ruiz. Led by Cinque, the slaves were now masters of the ship.

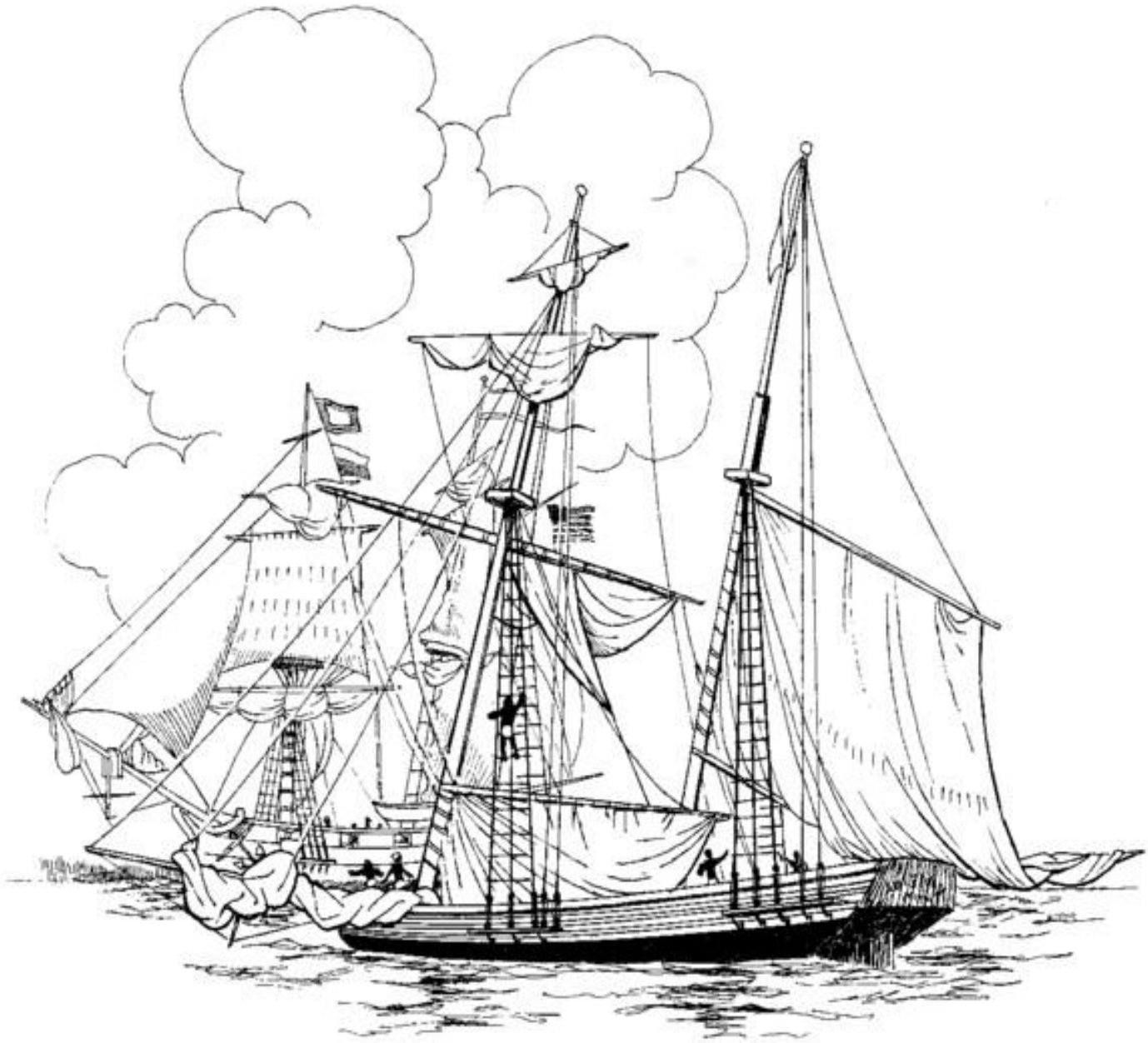
Cinque. The African most remembered among the *Amistad* mutineers was Cinque, the eldest son of a village headman in Mende. His African name was Sengbe Pieh; he was born around 1813. In Africa, acting for his father, he had led the village farmers into the fields each day and inspected their work. Cinque was kidnapped and taken by slavers to the coast, where he was sold to Pedro Blanco at the slave-trading island of Lomboko. This portrait of Cinque is based on a painting done from life by Nathaniel Jocelyn, a New England artist who supported the abolitionist cause.



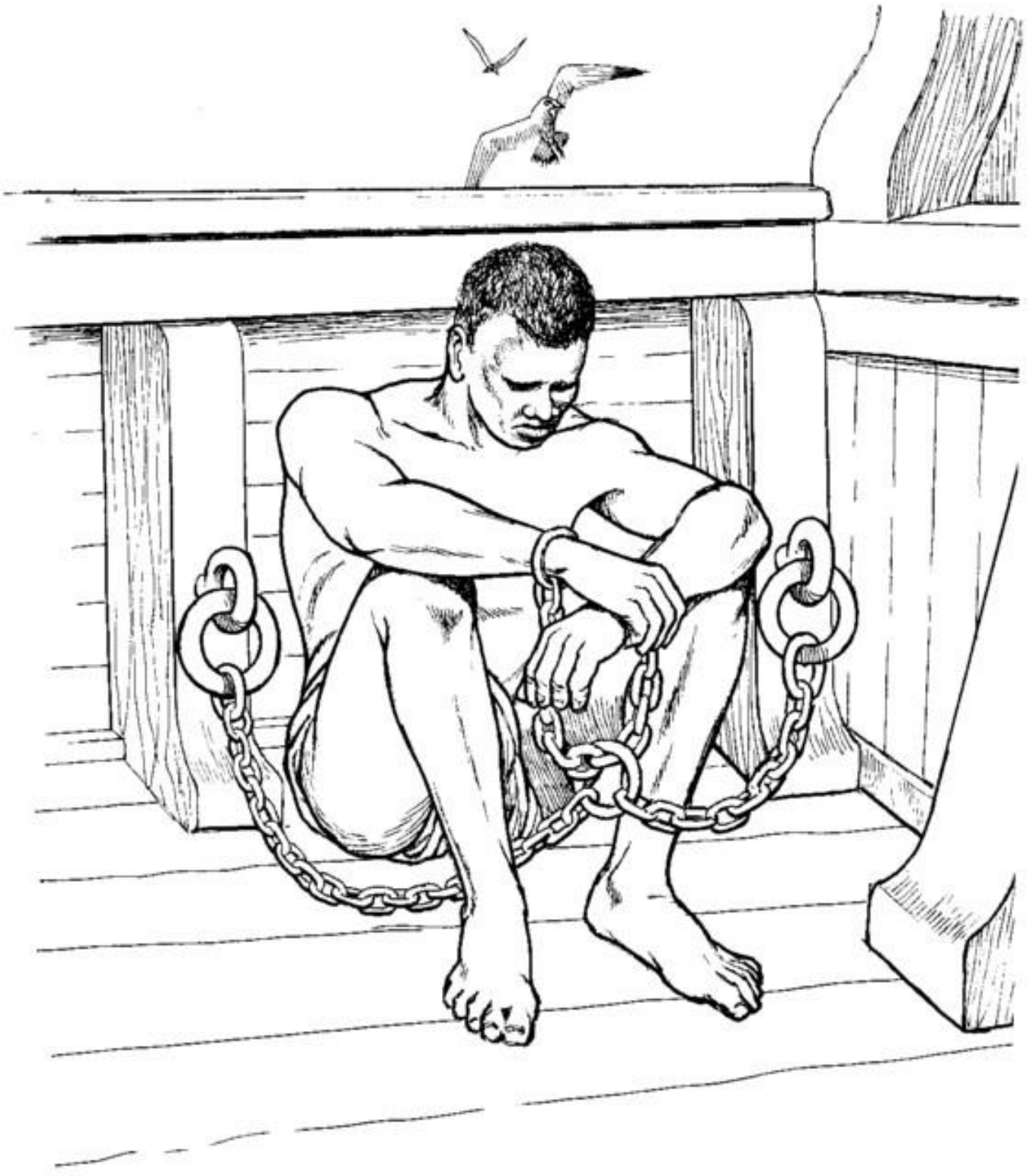
The slaves take command of the ship. Once they were free, the Africans seized the ship's cargo, taking what they liked from the bales of cloth, kegs of rum, barrels of beef, and other foodstuffs meant for the captain and crew. Their only food as slaves had been scant amounts of boiled rice. After the extreme deprivation of the voyage, they could eat as they pleased, drink rum, and drape themselves in fine printed cloth, as they enjoyed their freedom on deck.



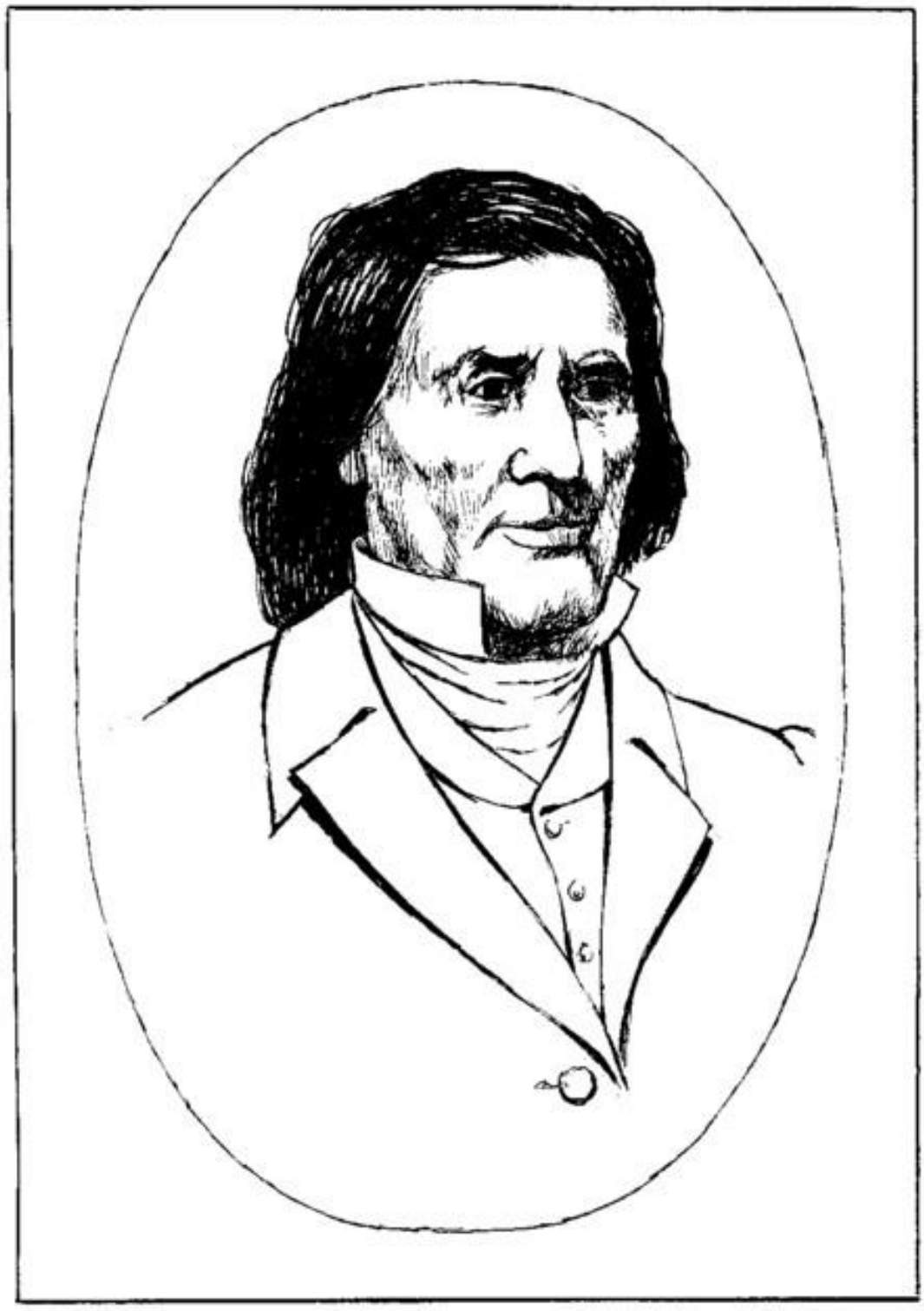
The Spaniard steers by night. Cinque soon restored order on deck and took the helm in order to steer to the east, toward Africa. He ordered that the Spaniards, held captive in the hold, be brought up on deck. Pedro Montez was forced to teach the Africans how to set and take in sail, but the *Amistad*, without a navigator, made little headway in unpracticed hands. Montez secretly planned to bring the ship to the Bahamas or a port in the southern U.S., where he might have the slaves imprisoned and sold at one of the American slave markets. Thus, Montez steered by night while Cinque slept, trying to shape his course. The schooner gradually became a derelict, her tattered sails rotting; the Africans grew more apprehensive, hoping against hope that they were sailing toward Africa. A number of the Mendes sickened and died as the food stores ran low. Finally, in August, they made landfall off the North American coast on the east end of Long Island, New York.



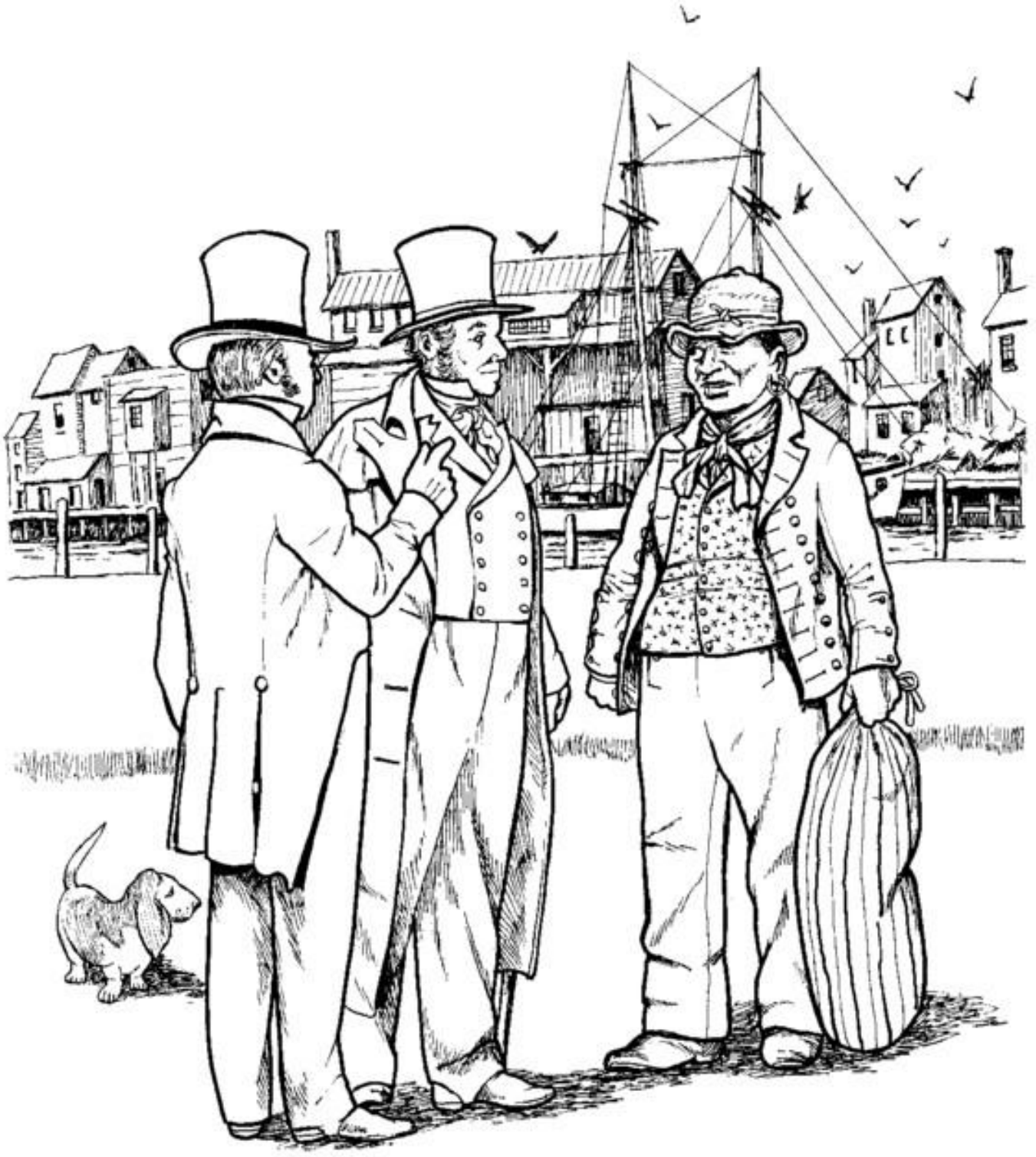
The *Amistad* is seized by the U.S. Navy. Cruising slowly along the Long Island shoreline, the Africans tried to negotiate with local people for food and water. The *Amistad* was finally anchored off Culloden Point while Cinque tried to think what to do next—how to procure water and stores and resume their voyage to return to Africa. The U.S. brig *Washington*, surveying the coastline, encountered the vessel and took possession of it. The captive Spaniards sought the protection of the U.S. government, claiming that the Africans were mutineers, thieves, and murderers.



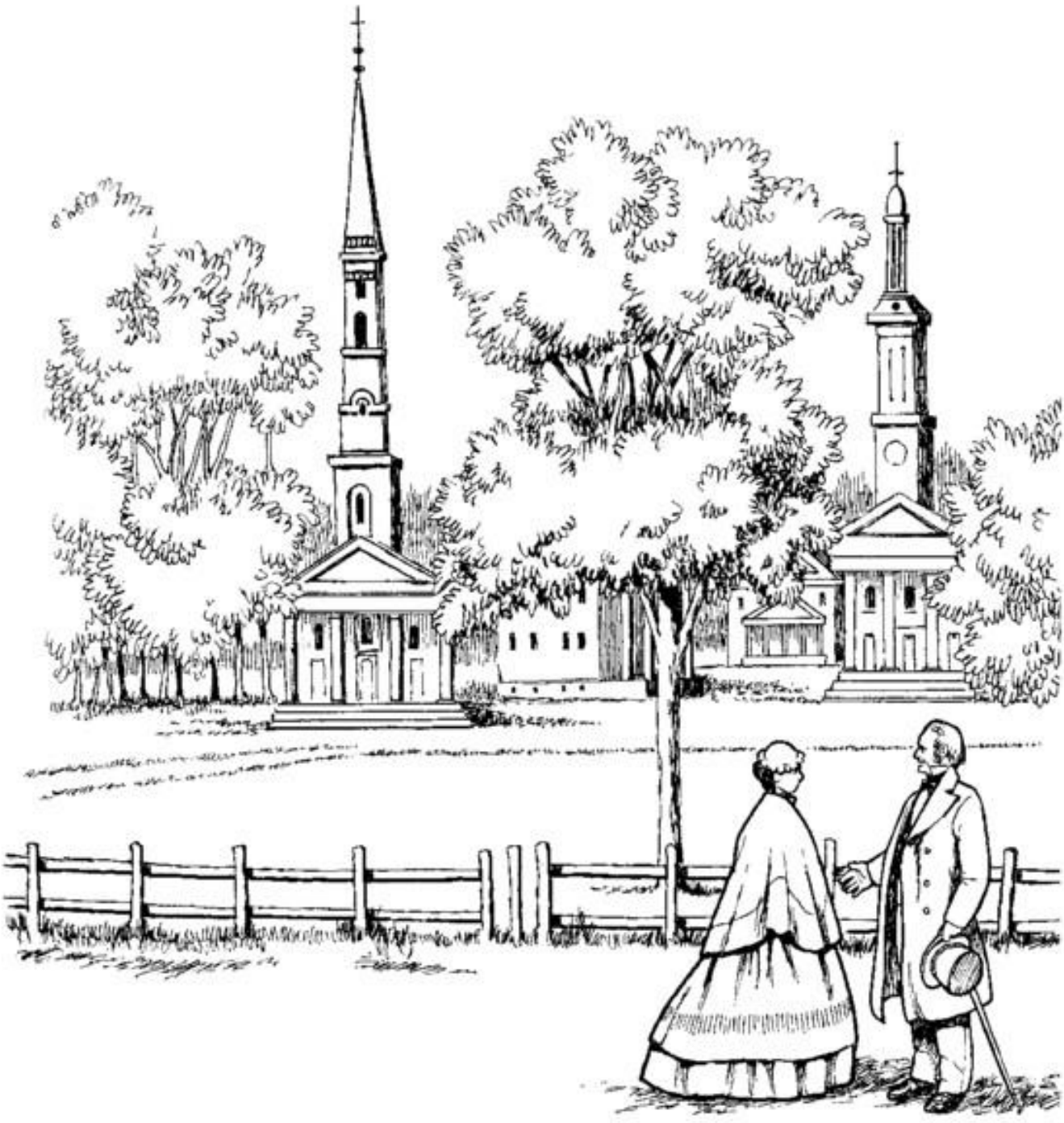
Cinque is again in chains. Sailors from the *Washington* confined the Africans to the *Amistad* but took Cinque, their leader, aboard the brig and shackled him to the deck. Cinque now believed that their struggle for freedom had been in vain –he would be executed for murder and the other Africans would be returned to slavery. The *Amistad* and her human cargo were impounded by the U.S. Navy, awaiting instructions from higher authority.



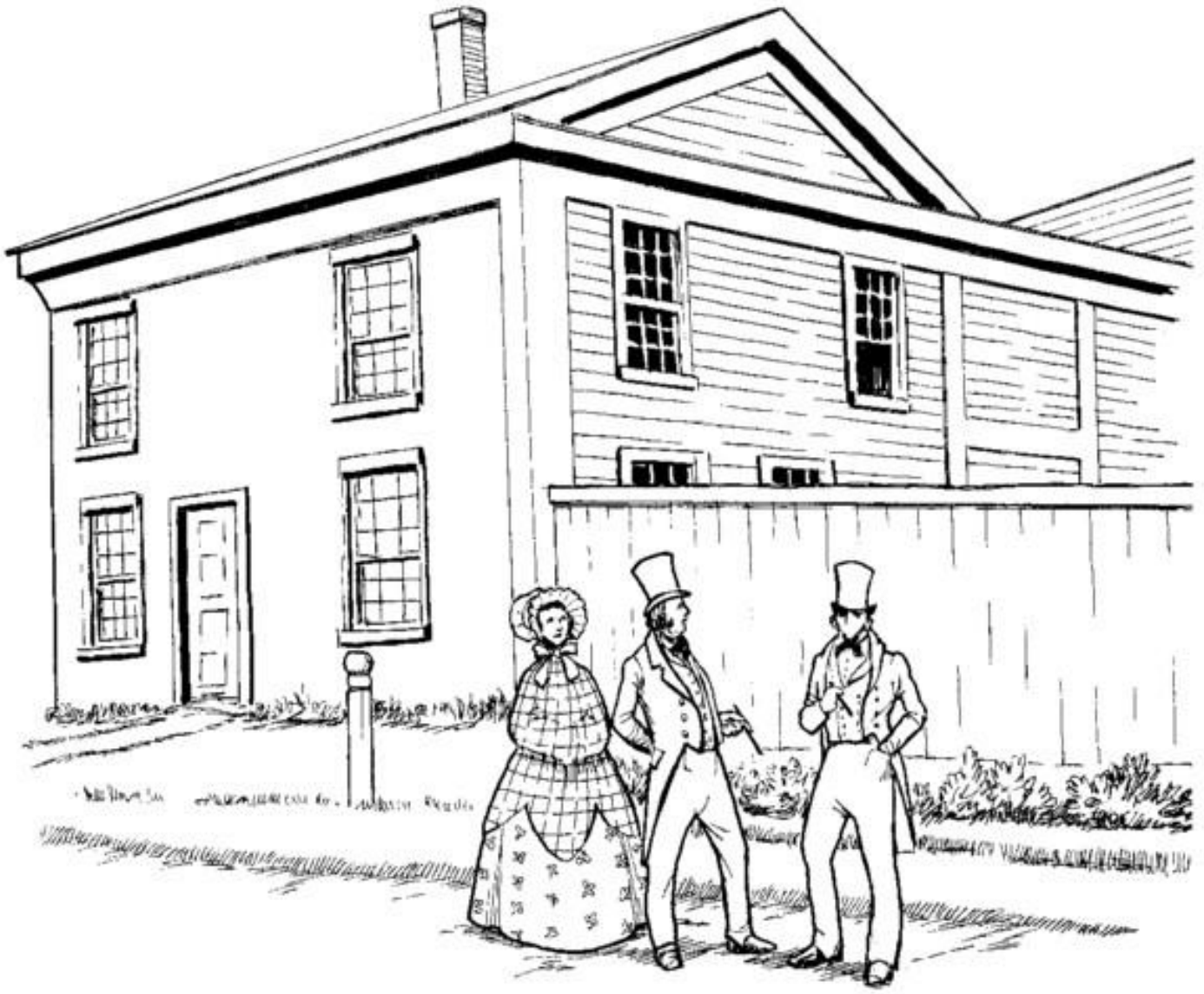
Professor Josiah Gibbs. Judge Andrew Judson, after boarding the *Washington* and hearing testimony, freed Ruiz and Montez. He ordered that the Mende Africans be tried in a Connecticut court for the crimes of murder and mutiny. The decision was made that the Africans of the *Amistad* would be tried in the state of Connecticut in a court of law for the crimes of mutiny and murder. Soon newspaper editors in New England became interested, and the *Amistad* case began to achieve notoriety. The Africans were brought to New Haven, where the trial was to be held. The plight of the prisoners roused much interest in the abolitionist and anti-slavery societies of the U.S., and the leaders of these movements decided to take the initiative in the defense of the Africans in court. Professor Josiah Gibbs, shown here, realized that in order to present an effective defense for the Africans (none of whom spoke any language other than Mende), a translator must be found to present their words to the court.



An interpreter is found. A Committee of Friends of the *Amistad* was formed by members of the abolitionist community to represent the Africans at the circuit court at Hartford. An interpreter for the Africans was found by Professor Gibbs on the New York waterfront. James Covey, a sailor, originally from Mende country, who spoke both Mende and English. Now the *Amistad* Africans had friends and defenders, and a voice in court. The trial was now transferred to the Circuit Court at Hartford, Connecticut. In September 1839, Judge Smith Thompson referred the case to the District Court. Judge Judson then ruled that the Africans could be released on bail; the defense, however, felt that this confirmed their status as slaves, and the Africans instead went back to prison.



The Public Green, New Haven, Connecticut, 1840. In January 1840 the District Court trying the *Amistad* Africans reconvened at New Haven (after an adjournment in November 1939). It was here that Judge Judson ruled that the Africans' enslavement had violated Spanish law, and that the Africans must be returned to their homeland. The U.S. government appealed, arguing that the Africans should be returned to their lawful owner, Don Jose Ruiz. Shown here is a view of the town of New Haven around 1840.

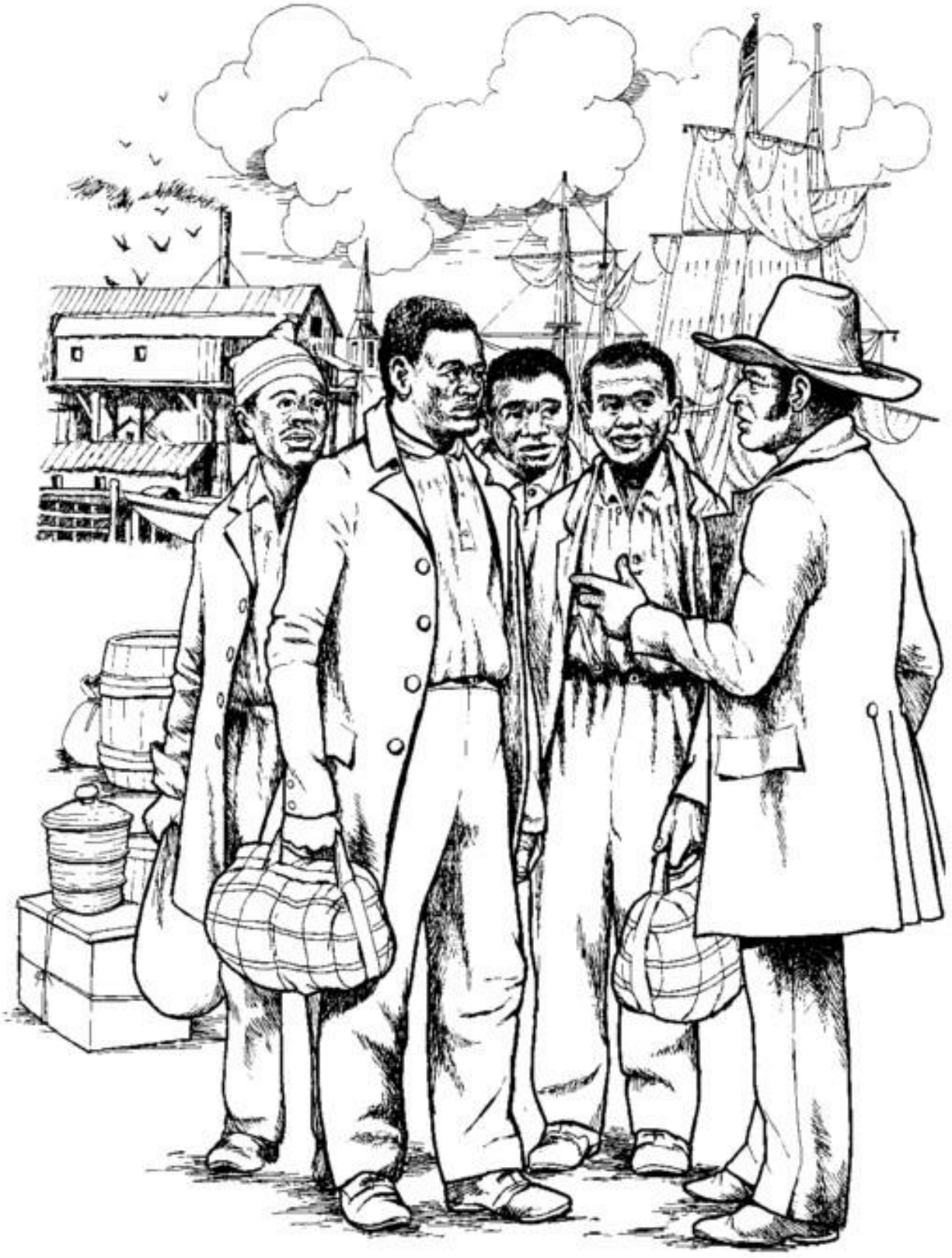


The Connecticut home of some *Amistad* Africans. Shown here is the building in Farmington, Connecticut, that housed many of the prisoners during their trial. Built by abolitionist Austin F. Williams, it was the temporary home for the male *Amistad* Africans. Farmington supporters of the Africans donated clothing and began educating the Africans during their stay. After they won their freedom, the *Amistad* Africans returned to Farmington to receive further education from their supporters.

John Quincy Adams. In October 1840, John Quincy Adams, former U.S. president and a member of the House of Representatives, agreed to argue the case of the *Amistad* prisoners. Son of former U.S. president John Adams, John Quincy Adams agreed to argue the case for the *Amistad* prisoners even though he hadn't practiced law for three decades. In his plea before the court in February 1841, Adams demonstrated that the Africans had been wrongly imprisoned for over 18 months by the U.S. government. The government, he argued, had no right to decide the fate of the *Amistad* Africans, who had been illegally enslaved (slavery was illegal under Spanish law), arriving on U.S. shores quite by accident. On March 9, 1841, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that the Mende prisoners were to be freed and returned to Africa [*United States v. the Amistad*: March 9, 1841].

Some Mende Africans from the *Amistad*. Here we see some of the *Amistad* Africans, their likenesses derived from sketches made from life at the time of their trial. Fu-li-wa was a Mende from the town of Ma-no; he had five brothers. Ba had a wife and a child in Mende. He was a rice planter and also raised goats, cows, and sheep. Ba-u was a farmer from Mende. He had a wife and three children and lived on the river Wo-wa. Fa-gin-na was born at Tombulu in Mende country. Mar-gru was a young girl from Mende who was taken by slavers in payment for a debt owed by her father.

Justice Joseph Story. One of the justices of the Supreme Court who presided over the case of the *Amistad* prisoners was Joseph Story. On March 9, 1841, he read the opinion of the Supreme Court: the *Amistad* defendants had won their freedom and were to be returned to Africa.



Mende Africans about to return home. In November 1841, the *Amistad* prisoners finally were ready to return home. The Committee for the *Amistad* Africans engaged a ship, the *Gentleman*, for the voyage. The ship was hired through fund-raising speaking tours by the Africans, arranged by the Connecticut abolitionists. A missionary group sailed with them, hoping to establish a Christian mission in Mende country. In January 1842, after a rough voyage, the *Gentleman* anchored at Freetown, in the region that is now Sierra Leone.

Home at last! The *Amistad* Africans found that life had been hard in Mende during the three years of their absence. A bitter war fought between the Mendes and the neighboring Timmanees had destroyed many villages and brought many men, women, and children into the waiting hands of the slave traders. Some of the more fortunate returnees discovered wives, parents, and other family folk who had never thought to see them again in tearful reunions.

Epilogue. The Mende Africans of the *Amistad* assisted the white missionaries in establishing a Christian mission at Bonthe in Mende country. Cinque, finding his home village destroyed and his family gone, left the mission to become an up-country trader. Most of the *Amistad* Mendes, after serving for a time at the mission, returned to traditional ways and tried to reestablish lives of their own. Cinque became a ruler in the Mende country. Here we see Ka-li, one of the *Amistad* captives, as he appeared as an old man. He remained faithful to the mission and worked there until his death.

Their fates were varied in later life, but the Africans who had been part of the revolt on the *Amistad* returned to Africa to live as free people. The *Amistad* herself was sold under a court-ordered process in Connecticut in 1840, soon losing her identity as a slave ship amid the bustle of a busy New England shipping community.